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DISCUSSION

DR. MONTAGUE AND THE PRAGMATIC NOTION OF
VALUE

IN controversy, it is important to tell the truth, but it is still more important to confute the opponent. Sometimes, consequently, the opponent is in all innocence confuted at the expense of the truth; for the eagerness to make a point shuts out much, foreshortens much, and prevents a man from seeing anything but what he wishes. I am afraid that in Vol. VI., No. 9, of this JOURNAL, Dr. Montague, in his article on "The True, the Good, and the Beautiful from a Pragmatic Standpoint," has placed himself in this too common situation of the controversialist. So eager does he appear to have been to distinguish between "the true, the good, and the beautiful," that he has become blind altogether to a certain common character they happen to have, and appears to have missed the point that pragmatists identify truth and beauty as "mere forms of goodness" because of this common character, not because of any divergencies they may contain. That they contain divergencies no pragmatist has ever denied. What the pragmatist has denied is the notion that their excellence consists in those divergencies; what he has insisted on is the fact that their value is derived from a common function symbolized by the word "good," just as an oyster-shell, a steel blade, and a flat stone are "knives," through the exercise of the common function of cutting. But this thesis Dr. Montague has not considered at all.

To establish his contention he has manufactured a new statement of the "pragmatic standpoint." He calls it "the disposition to reinterpret the logical, ethical, and esthetic values of experience in the light of their relations to the life-processes of the organism." It sees "human experience as a series of efforts to bring about a harmonious adjustment or vital equilibrium between the private experience of the individual and the incomparably broader experience of an enviroing nature." This adjustment may be attained in three ways: "First, the (individual) element may undergo whatever alteration of its nature is demanded by the context, the context itself remaining unaltered; or second, the context may undergo whatever alteration is demanded by the element, the latter remaining unaltered; or third, the element and its context may each of them spontaneously, and without compulsion from one another, attain harmony or equilibrium." The first of these adjustments Dr. Montague identifies with truth, "for when we are testing the truth of a judgment it is essential to the success of the

process that we make the judgment accord with the environing facts." The second he identifies with "goodness," the satisfaction of desire; which occurs "when the environment conforms to or gratifies the conative demands of the individual." The third he identifies with beauty, which "simply happens" in the accord of the environment "with the organism or with any part of it, in such a way as to accelerate or facilitate its processes."

Now it might easily be urged against the positions here taken up that Dr. Montague is putting up a man of straw in order to knock him down. If he were really to confute the pragmatists, he must confute them out of their own mouths. There are pragmatic accounts of truth galore with which Dr. Montague's account is in no sense compatible; there are pragmatic accounts of goodness and beauty with which his are little more harmonious. Properly, it was his business to show that pragmatic accounts of truth are not consistent with such accounts of goodness and beauty. It was not sufficient merely to assert, in a historical account of the relation of Dr. Schiller to Mr. Bradley, that the "conative and the cognitive types of value are as distinct from one another as north and south, and to seek to identify them or to reduce either to a form of the other is sheer confusion." It was not sufficient; and it is still less sufficient to have admitted in the same paragraph that "no experience is so purely conative as not to have a cognitive aspect, and none is so purely cognitive as to be free from the element of conation" (p. 236). If Dr. Montague seriously meant to refute the pragmatic thesis that the true and the beautiful are "forms of the good," it was his proper task to show that the pragmatist's own proof of this relation was incompatible with its existence. It was his business to confute them out of their own mouths, not to manufacture his own version of what they mean.

But I am content to accept this version at its own face value and to show that the man of straw, in falling, must needs tumble on its author's head. It must do so because its author, in his eagerness to show the differences in values, failed to consider a certain other difference which the pragmatists have insisted on, and the discussion of which is as old as Plato. That difference is the difference between instrumental and final goods. As pragmatism has made much of the instrumental aspect of value, it may be well to consider a little, what, according to Dr. Montague's pragmatism, the instrumental good consists in. The business of life, "human experience," Dr. Montague tells us at the outset of his paper, "may be viewed as a series of efforts to bring about a harmonious adjustment, or vital equilibrium, between the private experience of the individual and the incomparably broader experience of an environing nature."

Such an adjustment or "vital equilibrium," if attained, would be a stopping point, uninstrumental, self-sufficient, intrinsically stable. It is the goal of effort, the poise of judgment, the condition of pleasure. Now clearly, if the "series of efforts" have any value, it is a value they derive from their success in establishing this adjustment. The excellence of an instrument, though Dr. Montague's discussion does not allow it, is determinable traditionally by its success in fulfilling its purpose. And this purpose, enunciated so unfalteringly by Dr. Montague—is it good or bad, desired or undesired? Dr. Montague does not say, he is too busy (having told us that human experience is a *series of efforts* to bring about a "vital equilibrium"), proving that some efforts differ from others. He forgets to observe that they are all *efforts*, and that they are united in a *common* purpose. He fails to note that this purpose, this "vital equilibrium" is, on his own rules, to be attained *conatively*, and that the *seat* of the process of alteration is not in issue—that what is in issue is the fact that the attainment of what he calls "truth" is a *process*, just as the attainment of what he calls "good" is a process. When either of these is attained, there occurs what he calls a "vital equilibrium," but he insists that there is nothing in common between these equilibria, simply because the ways of getting at them are different. Yet strangely enough, they *are* equilibria, they *are* "harmonious adjustments of organisms to environment." Under the circumstances one would be tempted to say that the intrinsic nature of goodness was identical with the "vital equilibrium" and that the "truth-process" and the "desire-process" and the "beauty-process" were instruments that bring it about. But for some occult reason Dr. Montague supposes that because the organism changes more than the environment, the equilibrium at the end of the change is different from that attained when the environment changes more than the organism. Similarly it may be argued that if Dr. Montague travels to Boston by way of New Haven, and I travel to Boston over the Harvard Bridge, and Dr. Schiller is translated to Boston on a magic carpet, just "happens" in Boston, that we have arrived at different cities. The way through New Haven is the way through New Haven, and the way over Harvard Bridge is no doubt the way over Harvard Bridge, and the carpet is the carpet, but they are all *good* only as *ways to* Boston, and the purpose in hand, being-in-Boston, is good-in-itself. It is a "vital equilibrium." The instrumental value of things is definable only by their efficiency in realizing their purpose; their goodness is derived from that purpose, itself an excellence, intrinsic, immediate, simple. If truth and goodness and beauty are processes only, purposing a vital equilibrium, they are "good" in so far as

they reach it; and each is *good in the same way* as the others; if they *are* the "vital equilibrium," it is incumbent on Dr. Montague to show that this differs *intrinsically* for each form of value. But he can not do this—for *qua* "vital equilibrium" truth and beauty and goodness are identical.

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REVIEWS AND ABSTRACTS OF LITERATURE

Principii di scienza etica. F. DE SARLO & G. CALÒ. Palermo: Sandron (no date). Pp. 316.

La patologia mentale in rapport all' etica e al diritto. By the same authors. Palermo: Sandron. Pp. 194.

It is certainly not easy to unite the idea of ethics as a science, which implies the principle of causation, and the idea of the indetermination of the will. And the difficulty can be excluded only by giving to the word "science" an extended meaning. The authors describe science as "the orderly and systematic knowledge of a given order of facts, of their laws and of the ultimate principles of these laws" (p. 1). The object of ethical science is the moral experience; and this consists in the fact, which can be immediately experienced, of the consciousness of every individual of civil society in the present degree of civilization that certain actions are considered as deserving to be done, or as obligatory, and certain others as unworthy, or contrary to duty (p. 5). The moral consciousness is clearly distinguished from the social consciousness, because this last does not necessarily imply the sentiment of the intrinsic value of a certain form of conduct; and it differs also from the juridical, political, religious, and esthetic consciousness. Consequently, ethics is an independent science, independent also of metaphysics. There is a metaphysics of morals, but no metaphysical ethics (p. 28). Ethics is founded on an immediate, evident certainty, while metaphysics, which is a rational reconstruction of the world, can not pretend to this evidence and immediate certainty. The latter has to do with *what is*, while the first has for its object *what ought to be*. The judgments of the one are what the Germans call *Existentialurtheile*, those of the other, *Werthurtheile*. Ethics is not a merely descriptive, but an essentially normative science (p. 29). The special question of the normative character of ethics is an aspect of the general question of the nature of the highest functions of the mind. In a certain sense, it can be said that the mind is in itself normative as knowing, as creating, as willing: in theoretical, in esthetical, in practical activity, it has the idea of an end to which it ascribes a value in itself, which it considers as normal and suiting to its nature, and which consequently reveals itself under the form of norms. But it must be considered that norms exist only in reference to certain ends, and ends exist only, in the mind, in reference to the will (p. 34). So that only moral laws are truly normative.

In our inquiry after those absolute values—those ultimate ends, which